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ABSTRACT

Prior to the Virginian Standards of Learning Program most curriculum guidance was provided by the Board of Education through course requirement in-service sessions and through legislative action on mandated topics. The Standards of Learning Program gave Virginia teachers primary responsibility for establishing minimum competencies and assessment procedures for citizenship education. Local schools were directed by the Virginia State Department of Education to establish standards that could be used to determine eligibility for graduation. Definitional and curriculum issues in social studies were outlined. Teachers were selected to develop a manual outlining the social studies standards for each grade level, including specifications and instruments for assessing each standard. The results of the program revealed that social studies programs lacked a national focus; there was no fundamental understanding of what was taught or learned; the curriculum being taught was fragmented and ambiguous; and many state education departments were not responding to their leadership responsibilities and were deferring to local schools. (RM)

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STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES: A CASE STUDY

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April 12, 1985

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Standards for Social Studies: A Case Study

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April 12, 1985

Introduction

While I have followed closely the work and progress of the SSEC, I have been an inactive member and absent from its proceedings for some time. The Spring meeting normally comes at a time when I am heavily involved in preparing summer institutes at the University. In fact I have an institute beginning next week. I agreed to present this brief paper for two reasons--my long absence from the stimulation of this group and my frustration over definitional and curriculum issues in social studies.

I agreed to provide a paper for this meeting if I could combine it with work I was (and am) currently involved with in Virginia. For the last two years I have served as a consultant for the Virginia Testing Service to complete assessment procedures for the Virginia Standards of Learning Program in social studies. I did not participate in writing the Standards, but the experience has served to magnify many of my feelings about our social studies profession--its strengths and weaknesses but mostly its limitations and failures. We are about to begin the assessment of these Standards for social studies programs in Virginia. This paper is an attempt to describe that process and how the process illuminates the problems of our profession. Many of you have shared similar experiences and my observations and conclusions will appear obvious.

Social Studies: The Curriculum Problem

In 1978 the president of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) formed a Committee on Testing to study the relationship between the

NCSS Curriculum Guidelines and the NCSS Multiethnic Guidelines and the practice of testing in social studies (Fox, Williams and Moore, 1978.) Our report to the NCSS Board of Directors raised the concern that NCSS standards for curriculum leadership and reform in social studies education:

- failed to provide a philosophy or rationale for the social studies
- failed to provide professional guidance in building a social studies program around any consistent set of outcomes

In fact the NCSS standards really gave credence to anything that a school might be already practicing under the rubric social studies. Consequently, any relationship between standardized tests and NCSS Curriculum Guidelines had to lacking in significance.

Members of the Committee on Testing became interested in what the various states do about determining the social studies curriculum and what the states were doing with minimum competency testing. Paul Williams and I surveyed state leaders in social studies to determine the central influence on social studies curricula and to determine the relationship between social studies curricula and minimum competencies (Moore and Williams, 1980.) We found that:

- most states permit local districts to determine the social studies knowledge of most worth
- most states mandate courses and/or topics rather than provide a philosophy or rationale for social studies
- states frequently require minimum competencies in social studies areas that are not typically included in the mandated course guide

While publication of the NCSS bulletin Defining the Social Studies (Barr, Barth and Shermis, 1977) gave the appearance that NCSS wanted a national debate on the meaning of the social studies, the opposite became clear from actions by the organization. Outside political forces were less shy about influencing social studies curricula. The National Assessment of Educational Progress project brought into focus the presence (or absence) of

civic participation and problem solving in social studies. The Joint Council for Economic Education's produced a Framework for Economic Education that defined curriculum outcomes in terms of specific skills and concepts. Numerous other organizations have participated in efforts to shape social studies. Note, for example, that the National Council for Geographic Education in its recent curriculum bulletin (NCGE, 1985) suggests that

> "Geography belongs in every grade level of the curriculum. Ideally it should be a separate school subject."

The problem seems obvious. What are social studies educators about? Are we to identify ourselves with discrete interest groups? I am constantly struck by the continuous call for some centrality for the social studies curriculum. The recently published report of the NCSS Taskforce on Scope and Sequence produced even greater confusion about social studies:

> "In fact, the report gives the appearance of organizing the goals and objectives of the field [social studies] when, in reality, it is contributing to the continued ambiguity of purpose that has long plagued the social studies." (Longstreet, 1985)

There is considerable evidence that we also know little about what we do under the rubric "social studies curriculum." Donald Bragaw's observation that recent movements to establish competency or performance standards to guide or govern social studies indicate:

> "Only some of these [movements] came as a result of the 'National Reports,' but all of them reflect an uneasy feeling that no one really has a clear notion of just what is being taught and learned in school." (Bragaw, 1985)

One has only to turn to the most recent issue of Social Education to find that the most significant concerns facing social studies educators in 1982-3 was: (Hahn, 1985)

- o curriculum revision needed to overcome fragmentation
- o de-emphasis on social studies

If we do not know what we are about then by default the social studies

curriculum must belong to those who do know. Or do they know?

Virginia: Minimum Competency Movement

In 1976 the Commonwealth of Virginia, like many other states, succumbed to the minimum competency movement in reading, mathematics and citizenship (Pipho, 1978.) The Virginia State Department of Education (DOE) was directed by the State Board of Education to establish minimum standards in three areas of the curriculum; standards that could be used to determine eligibility for graduation. The minimum competencies for graduation were quickly agreed to and established for reading and mathematics, but considerable debate was initiated over the meaning of citizenship. Was citizenship coterminous with social studies? Did citizenship reflect the basic elements of government or political science? Was citizenship a participatory behavior demonstrated through community involvement or voter registration?

The DOE recommended to the State Board of Education that all graduating high school seniors should demonstrate competence in (Virginia Board of Education, 1976):

> "A basic knowledge and understanding of the history and cultures of the United States, including concepts and processes of democratic governance and our economic system."

During the following year, social studies educators (supervisors and college educators) were given the opportunity to input on the meaning of citizenship. Discussions and debates at state meetings focused upon professional documents (e.g. NCSS Guidelines), the experience of other states, problems in assessing citizenship behavior (even before it was defined), the interest groups in citizenship studies (law related education, economic education) and what was currently the programs of study in social studies in the local schools of the state. The biblical nature of NCSS documents offered little in the process of defining citizenship or social studies education for this process. Law

related education materials did offer suggested citizenship perspectives (as did global studies materials), but local programs of study constructed upon mandated courses seldom reflected the work of these interest groups. No one wanted to leave anything out of the curriculum. In summary social studies groups urged and influenced the DOE to suggest and promote a definition for citizenship that was broad enough to encompass all that was being done in social studies or what might be included at a later date. In 1978 the competency in social studies was revised to read that high school graduates must attain competence in (Virginia Board of Education, 1978):

> "Essential skills and concepts of citizenship, including knowledge of history and government, necessary for responsible participation in American society within the world community."

Observations about the nature of social studies educators that follow from this experience include:

- o social studies educators do not share a definition of citizenship or social studies and share little enthusiasm for the problem
- o almost uniformly social studies educators are distrustful of efforts to assess (particularly test) the outcomes of social studies programs

By 1978, the DOE was developing or had developed minimum competency assessment instruments for quantitative and reading skill areas. At the same time, the citizenship competency had been altered from knowledge of the United States with emphasis on history, government and economics (1976) to participation in American society within a world community (1978.). The DOE, for obvious reasons, chose not to develop instruments to assess accomplishment of this competency across the state. Instead, the General Assembly and the State Board of Education *postponed compliance with the new standard of minimum competency in citizenship while directing each school division to determine specific competencies for their youth under the broader citizenship standard and to determine a satisfactory process of assessment to give evidence of

compliance. School divisions across the state scrambled to define minimum competency in citizenship and to define the social studies context from which it emerged. National leadership for curricular definition of social studies and citizenship was lacking. Virginia leaders in social studies education clearly abdicated their responsibility in curriculum leadership to the local schools. Observation:

- o local school leaders must be able to define from experience what constitutes a minimum citizenship performance

The wealthier school divisions had resources available for the development of social studies programs and assessment procedures and quickly produced documents outlining planned activities. In 1980 the DOE produced a document entitled Sample Competencies and Test Items: Minimum Competencies in Citizenship. This new document was not to be definitive (DOE, 1980):

> "The competencies included were obtained primarily from local school divisions as part of a survey conducted by the Department of Education. The extensive list of competencies submitted by local school divisions were categorized and placed into four major competencies. The competencies and subcompetencies were further broken down into subcompetencies. The competencies and subcompetencies are only samples and are offered primarily for illustrative purposes and occupy no required or mandatory status.

The impact of this publication upon school divisions lacking resources for the development of curriculum materials and assessment *instruments seems fairly obvious; the sample materials heavily influenced teaching and assessment in social studies. Observation:

- o after failing to act to define citizenship the state had used a "delphi" process to lead by concensus

In summary, minimum competency in citizenship and it relationship to the social studies program was different for *each school division. Many of us began to ponder the question 'What happens to the students who move between school divisions?' Would he/she need a passport to transfer citizenship?

One side effect of this effort was to establish a "citizenship" type

course in the eighth grade across the state. Since failing students would need remediation, it was necessary to assess competency compliance early in the secondary school program. Social studies requirements in secondary school were:

7th grade	Virginia/ United States History
8th grade	No requirement
9th grade	World Geography or World History (one required)
10th grade	World Geography or World History (one required)
11th grade	American History
12th grade	Government

Courses between Virginia/US History and 12th grade government did not *accommodate "citizenship" type competencies. In effect the minimum competency movement produced a new course in the social studies curriculum. Quite naturally, the new "citizenship" courses reflected local definitions of social studies and citizenship. Course patterns have ranged from career education, consumer education, government, law related education and economic education to American history.

Analyses of the minimum competency movement across Virginia (Needham, 1982) revealed that:

- school divisions considered cognitive behavior to be adequate to certify citizenship competence--values, attitudes and participatory activities were generally absent from assessment
- world studies were not often considered a part of citizenship
- government, economics and American history were the core goals of citizenship

Despite the fact that all school divisions were to have a minimum competency program for citizenship in place by 1981, some 10% of the school divisions were not in compliance at that time. In fact there is considerable evidence that some school officials were told that they need not comply since a new program would soon supersede minimum competency efforts.

Virginia: Standards of Learning Program

The Virginia Board of Education, with urging by the DOE, adopted a

resolution in June, 1981 announcing that:

> "Basic skills and knowledge to be expected of students at each developmental level will be identified and published for kindergarten through grade 12. Objectives for language arts and mathematics will be completed by September, 1982 and objectives for other subject areas (social studies) and vocational education will be completed by September, 1984 for grades K-12. Assessment instruments for use in teaching and remediation will be made available to those school divisions which do not have such instruments of their own.

The program was to become entitled the Standards of Learning Program. At times public rhetoric about the Standards suggested that this was not a curriculum but merely a guide to schools. At other times the rhetoric became much more inflamed arguing that the process would bring curricula (social studies in our case) within a standardized framework for all schools. In 1982 the Superintendent of Public Instruction wrote (Davis, 1982):

> "The Standards of Learning Program is designed to identify what students are expected to accomplish, to provide a method for determining what has been learned, and encourage teachers to give additional instruction when needed. It is not intended to reduce the total school program to a single list of objectives or to replace the curriculum that a school division already may may have developed for its students. The staff in school divisions which already have such programs will need to examine them to ensure that the Standards of Learning Objectives are included.

Clearly the Standards were intended to serve as a basic core of the state social studies curriculum against which school divisions were to measure their school offerings and student performances. In fact the Board of Education had set forth in 1979 that among the purposes of this program were (Rubin, 1983):

- -to establish expectations for students which are agreed upon and accepted throughout the Commonwealth
- -to provide information on student progress toward attainment of the expectations
- -to identify strengths and weakness in the curriculum at state, school division, and individual school levels

Prior to the Standards program, the Virginia DOE had provided most curriculum guidance through in-service on course requirements established by the Board of Education. Sometimes curriculum decisions were influenced by legislative action to mandate topics or units in social studies--e.g. free enterprise. In 1980, the DOE produced a document, A Framework: The Social Studies Program in Public Schools, that gave guidance and suggestions for appropriate social studies content at each grade level. The Framework consisted of grade level summaries indicating the most likely knowledge, skills and attitudes produced at each grade. More importantly it included a skills chart that teachers might use in planning instruction in social studies. While social studies courses and topics were required by the state, the Framework was merely advisory.

Once the Standards of Learning Program was announced the DOE quickly produced a plan to develop the Standards. Committees on each domain of the public school curriculum were quickly organized with the specific charge that classroom teachers would write the objectives (Standards.) The DOE argued that teachers knew what was expected of children and youth at their grade level and that teacher developed curricula were most likely to be effective and durable. Observation:

- the state assumed that classroom teachers have a clear understanding of social studies at their grade level

- the state assumed that a collection of social studies teachers could define and bring order to the social studies curriculum

The Social Studies Service of DOE identified thirty-nine (39) teachers, three from every grade level, who were charged with writing social studies Standards. The teachers were selected on the basis that they had been active in the Virginia Council for the Social Studies (and/or NCSS), that they were known to be effective classroom teachers and/or that they were known to be

interested in and motivated by social studies knowledge and skills. In addition to the 39 teachers, members of the Social Studies Service, social studies supervisors representative of school divisions, representatives from selected interest groups (economics, geography, Virginia Education Association), and selected college educators were enrolled as consultants.

The social studies writing team met for the first time during the summer of 1981. The team assembled at a college campus where they could take over dormitories in a retreat atmosphere to debate and write the objectives. Five working days were set aside during the first summer to develop the Standards. On the first day, the DOE spent considerable time informing the teachers that the tasks consisted of identifying what students in social studies K-12 were expected to accomplish (Standards) and determining a method of assessing the Standards after they were developed. The teachers were given a series of documents to read and consider as they began their work. These materials consisted of:

A Framework: The Social Studies Program in Public Schools, K-12
[the skill chart was excluded]

History and Social Science Offerings: Grade Six Through Twelve, 1980-81
[describes required and elective courses]

NCSS Curriculum Guidelines (and other NCSS documents)

Each of these documents generally parallel " the dominant curriculum pattern identified by national studies conducted by Gross, Jarolimek, National Science Foundation, and Project SPAN" (Needham, 1982.) In addition sample materials from other states were available for research. The teachers were ask to bring their own curriculum guides and textbooks that might be used in determining what school divisions typically expected of their students in social studies. The importance of the textbook in *determining what is taught suggests that teachers would have wanted to bring them even if not directed to do so (Shaver, 1980.)

The teachers had three days to develop the Standards at each grade level leaving the fifth day (Friday) for discussion and reconsideration of Standards across grade levels. After one week of work, the teacher team produced 156 Standards (an average of 12 Standards per grade level) along with a program description for social studies at each grade level.

The work of the first summer was edited by the DOE and circulated to school officials for their comments and input. A few school divisions were given the opportunity to "field test" the objectives and report their findings. The field test consisted of asking teachers and individuals about the instructional potential for the Standards. One weakness in the Standards apparently did not surface in this process. There was considerable variability in the level of the Standards at any grade level. At least one Standard at each grade level was sufficiently global in nature to make instruction and/or assessment difficult if not impossible. For example:

Sixth Grade: The student will identify and describe selected cultures that have affected world history.

Eighth Grade: The student will demonstrate a basic understanding of the American legal, political and economic system.

Ninth Grade: The student will identify patterns of change and development caused by human activity and/or natural forces.

A reasonable hypothesis explaining this problem is that the teachers wanted the curriculum to reflect (legitimize) everything taught in their school and others like it. Evidence exists that the teachers were bothered by the notion that assessment might endanger the classroom teachers' freedom to choose how to and what to teach in social studies. If the Standards were all inclusive then the teachers would be guaranteed free choice. Apparently some social studies educators in leadership positions encouraged this behavior.

The same curriculum team was reconvened for five days during the summer of 1982. Using basically the same materials, the teachers were asked to

review the work of the previous summer along with input data and make whatever changes were necessary. In addition, they wrote descriptive statements to accompany each Standard. The descriptive statement was to clarify the Standard by naming and delineating the boundaries of the conceptual content. For example:

> Fourth Grade: The student will locate and identify land and water forms on maps and globes.
> Descriptive Statement: Emphasis will be on the seven continents, major countries, water ways, mountains, and other geographic features.

Occasionally the descriptive statements gave new or expanded meanings to the Standard. For example:

> Fifth Grade: The student will identify the major products and industries of the United States during the 17th to 19th century.
> Descriptive Statement: The emphasis will be upon the changes in American Farm productivity as the westward movement took place, and how the development of material resources led to the growth of American industries.

Identify major products and industries (memory) was expanded to include understanding (comprehension implied) of generalizations about American agriculture and industry.

Following activities in the summer of 1982, the Standards with descriptive statements were printed and distributed to all of the local school divisions in the state. School divisions were encouraged to determine how the Standards would be *accommodated by their social studies curriculum. Outside of the wealthier school divisions, most schools did not have curriculum guides and the reporting of the new Standards initiated efforts to produce curriculum materials that incorporated the Standards. In fact schools that did have curriculum guides initiated revision efforts. Observation:

- a process of creating Standards without a definition of social studies education became the driving force of curriculum reform

- Standards for Social Studies now existed without a clearly identified scope and sequence

Separate analyses of the Standards were conducted during the 1982-83 school year to identify the scope and sequence of the material. A member of the DOE Social Studies Service produced a strand analysis of the Standards (Page, 1983.) He reported seven strands:

cause and effect
citizenship
values and beliefs
cultural universals
physical environment
institutions and time
skills

The second analysis (Crockett, 1983) used Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Skills, Eunice Johns and Dorothy Fraser's Social Studies Skills Guide (NCSS 33rd Yearbook), and the skills chart attached to the Standards of Learning report to categorize each of the social studies Standards. Crockett concluded that there were noticeable gaps in social studies skills within the Standards and that skills were not always sequential or consistent in definition. He suggested that some Standards required re-writing. Apparently, it was not possible to re-write the Standards.

A new cohort of educators was convened for five days in the summer of 1983 to write *assessment procedures and specifications for the 156 Standards. Once again each grade level was represented by three classroom teachers. Measurement consultants and social studies specialists were assigned to various grade patterns--K-3, 4-6, 7-8, 9-12. Some of the teachers were returning from the first two summers, but many were new to the process. From the outset, it was clear that the teachers had not really considered assessment when establishing the social studies Standards. Old and new participants remarked that they should have given more consideration to the relationship between curriculum outcomes and assessment when they were writing

the Standards.

The classroom teachers were instructed on the process of preparing criterion-reference assessments--writing specifications, assessment procedures and instruments. The teachers were given a range of options in developing the assessments. They could choose among four assessment strategies--selected answer, short answer, directed performance and non-directed performance. In fact, they were encouraged to suggest as many strategies as they could for each Standard. In that way classroom teachers would have maximum flexibility in matching their instruction to each Standard with the most appropriate assessment. During this summer session, the teachers were generally successful in completing the specifications and procedures for assessing the Standards, but few instruments were completed.

A final cohort of teachers met for five days during the summer 1984 to complete the tasks begun during the previous summer. The teachers reviewed the work of the previous year and completed as many assessment instruments as possible. Classroom materials (textbooks, supplementary materials and workbooks) were the most frequently used materials in writing the assessment procedures and instruments. This was true of both summers--1983 and 1984.

Following the 1984 summer, instruments were repaired and completed by outside consultants and all of the work is under review at the present time. During the Fall of 1985, the Standards will be piloted by selected school divisions. Those schools will prepare instructional units and processes to meet the Standards and the new instruments will be used to assess performances. The final product after four years of effort will be a manual for every teacher outlining the social studies Standards for the grade level with specifications for and instruments for assessing each Standard. Teachers may combine the Standards into units of instruction in any form that they choose.

Observations and Conclusions

Most of my observations about the curriculum problem in social studies have been inserted throughout this paper. It seems to me that social studies education is really in danger of disappearing as a major element in elementary/secondary education. As we become increasingly fragmented by the numerous interest groups under the NCSS umbrella, we lose influence at the school house door. Failure to bring a national focus to social studies places stress on state departments of education to provide leadership. Some states have acted, but more states, like Virginia, have abdicated to local schools. Classroom teachers, despite their many virtues, do not carry a definition of social studies branded on their hearts or minds. [If they did where would they have gotten it.] Local action often means a curriculum of piecework; a patchwork quilt.

We know that the textbook holds the greatest influence on what is taught. We know that texts have become more homogeneous; reduced by common denominators of readability and interest group action. The result is an unexciting, indefensible program of studies established without identifiable sources of responsibility. Quite logically we fear assessment when we know not what we are about. The static condition of ambiguity in social studies curricula contributes I believe to the declining emphasis upon social studies in public schools. This leads me to the final observation that:

- o there is need for a national conference (committee) to produce definitional characteristics of social studies

One can only wonder what would happen if there was no social studies requirement in public schools. Would the absence of social studies make a real difference on our democratic values, our humanity, our allegiance to the social contract, our maturity within a local or world community? Currently, at least in Virginia, we see science and English teachers taking over social

studies classes as reductions in force take place. Math and language arts occupy most of the school day from kindergarten through grade five. Will (does) it make a difference? What are students missing? Who knows?

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